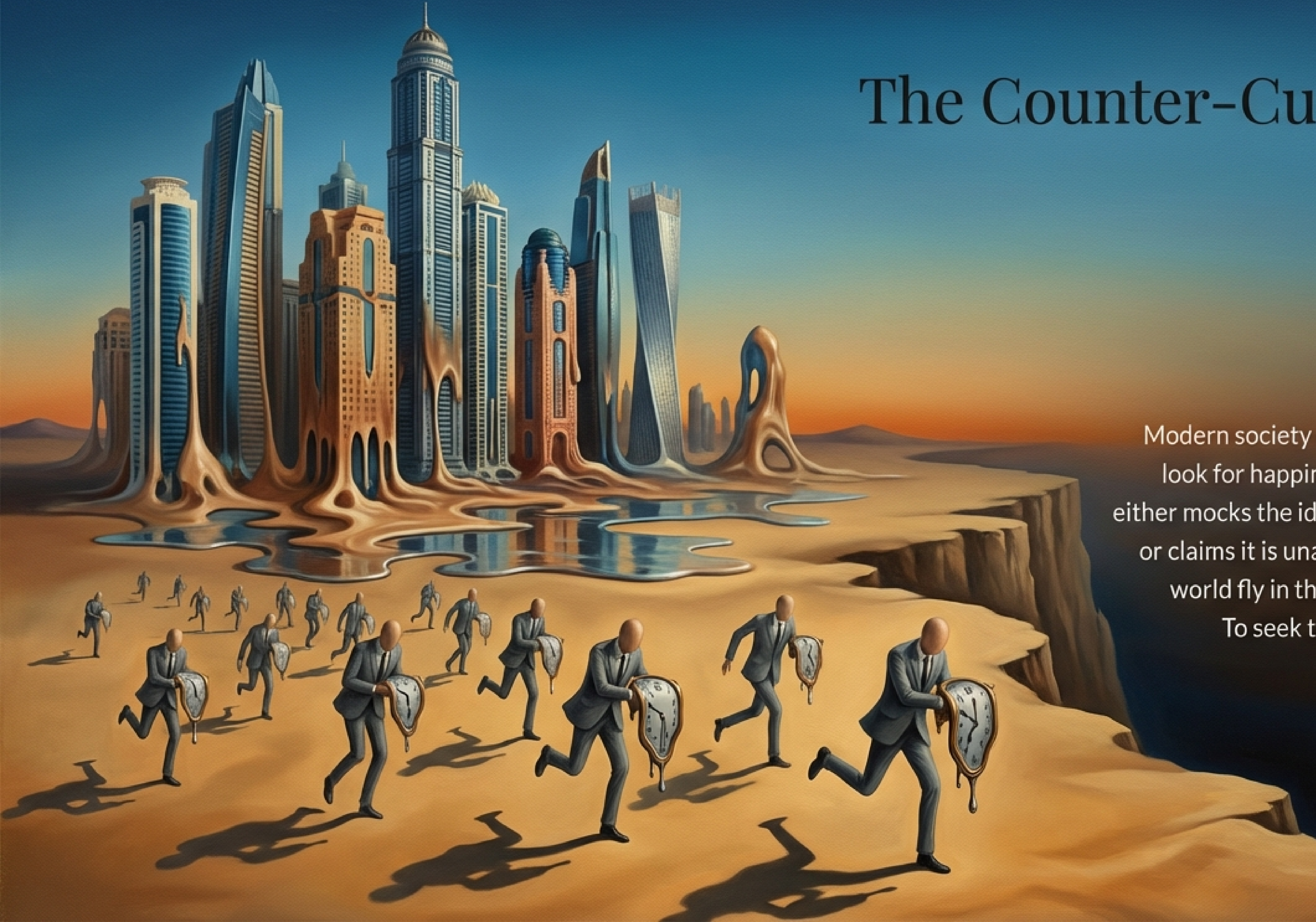
Sheltering the Meditative Life

Trading the Ordinary for the Unconditioned

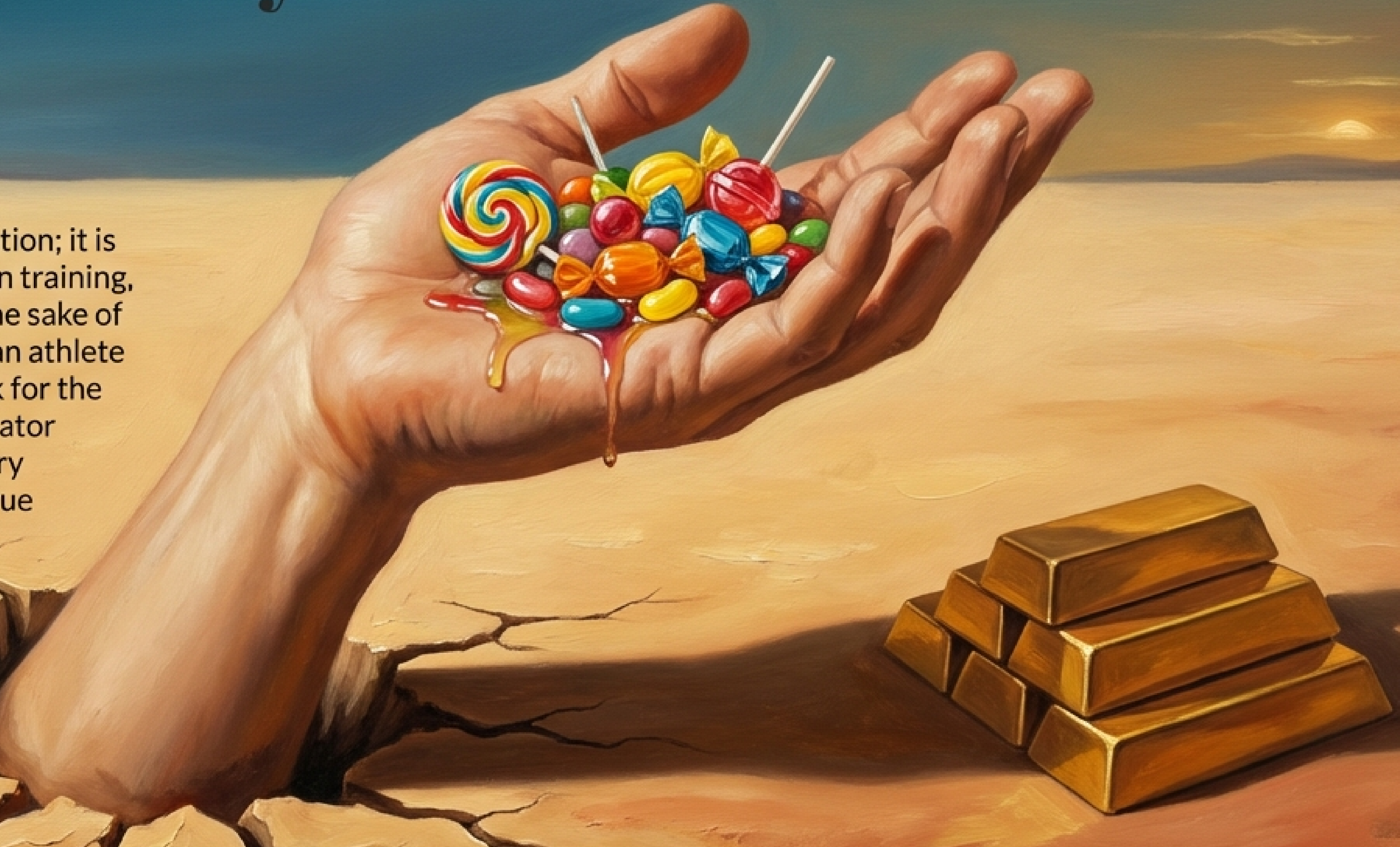
The practice of meditation for the sake of an unconditioned happiness is always counter-cultural. No one else is going to protect your conviction. You must build the shelter yourself.

The Counter-Cultural Path



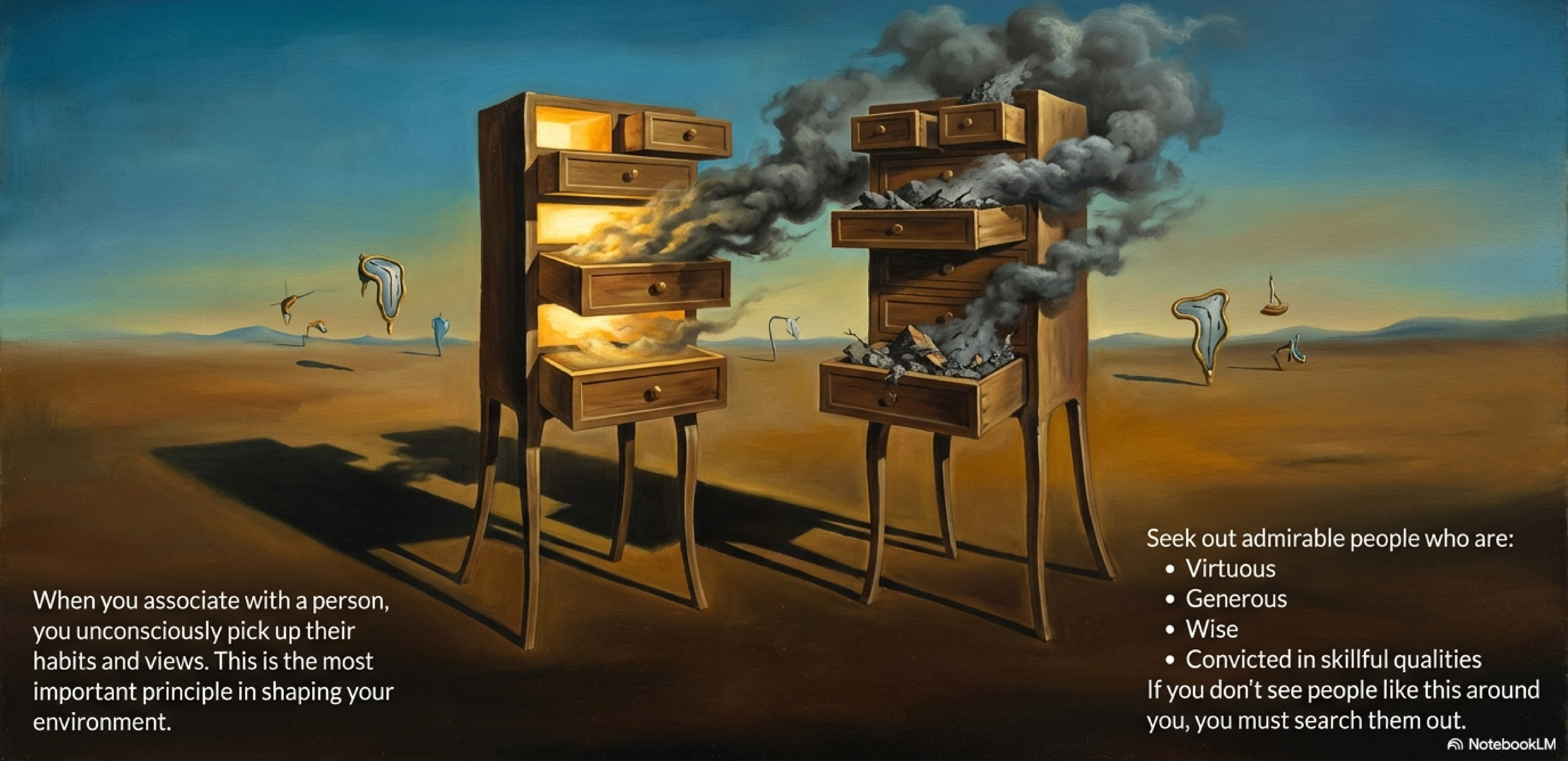
Modern society exerts immense pressure to look for happiness in things that change. It either mocks the idea of unchanging happiness or claims it is unattainable. The values of the world fly in the face of the meditative life. To seek the unconditioned, you must step out of the melting city.

Trading Candy for Gold



Renunciation is not deprivation; it is a trade. You are an athlete in training, accepting restrictions for the sake of peak performance. Just as an athlete prefers healthy food to junk for the sake of the game, the meditator trades the 'candy' of ordinary pleasures for the 'gold' of true happiness.

The Osmosis of Character

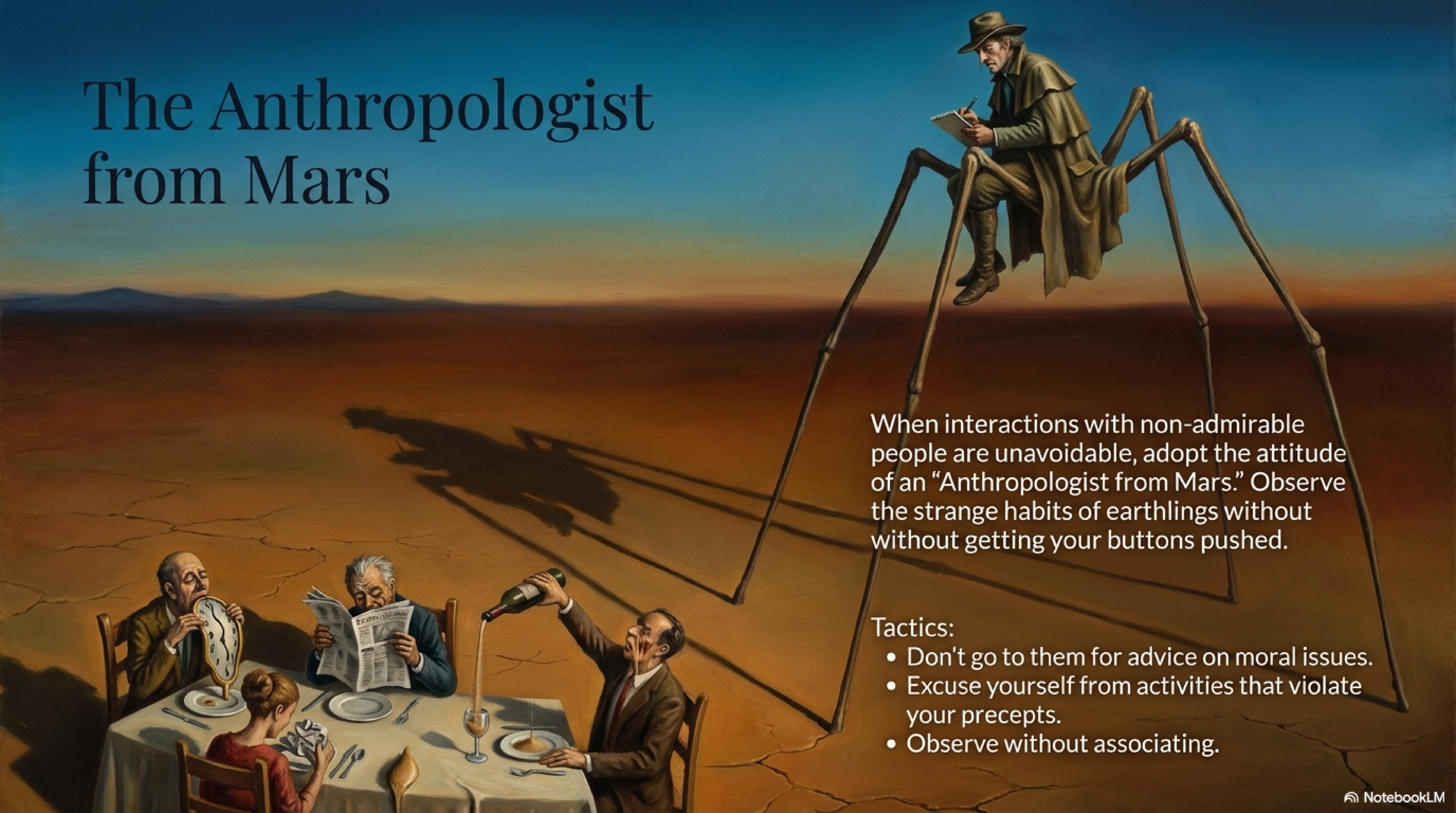


When you associate with a person, you unconsciously pick up their habits and views. This is the most important principle in shaping your environment.

Seek out admirable people who are:
- Virtuous
- Generous
- Wise
- Convicted in skillful qualities

If you don't see people like this around you, you must search them out.

The Anthropologist from Mars

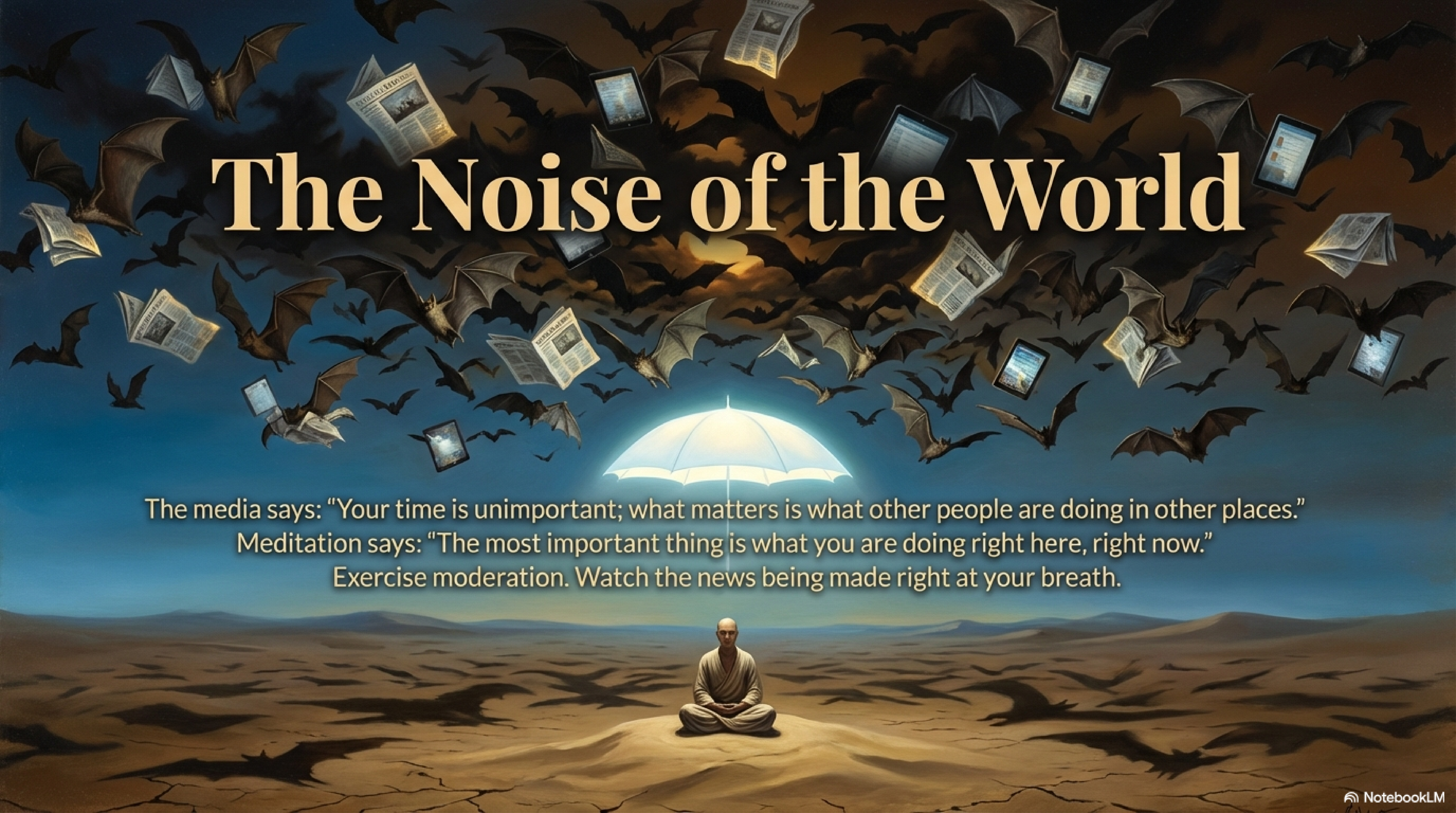


When interactions with non-admirable people are unavoidable, adopt the attitude of an “Anthropologist from Mars.” Observe the strange habits of earthlings without without getting your buttons pushed.

Tactics:

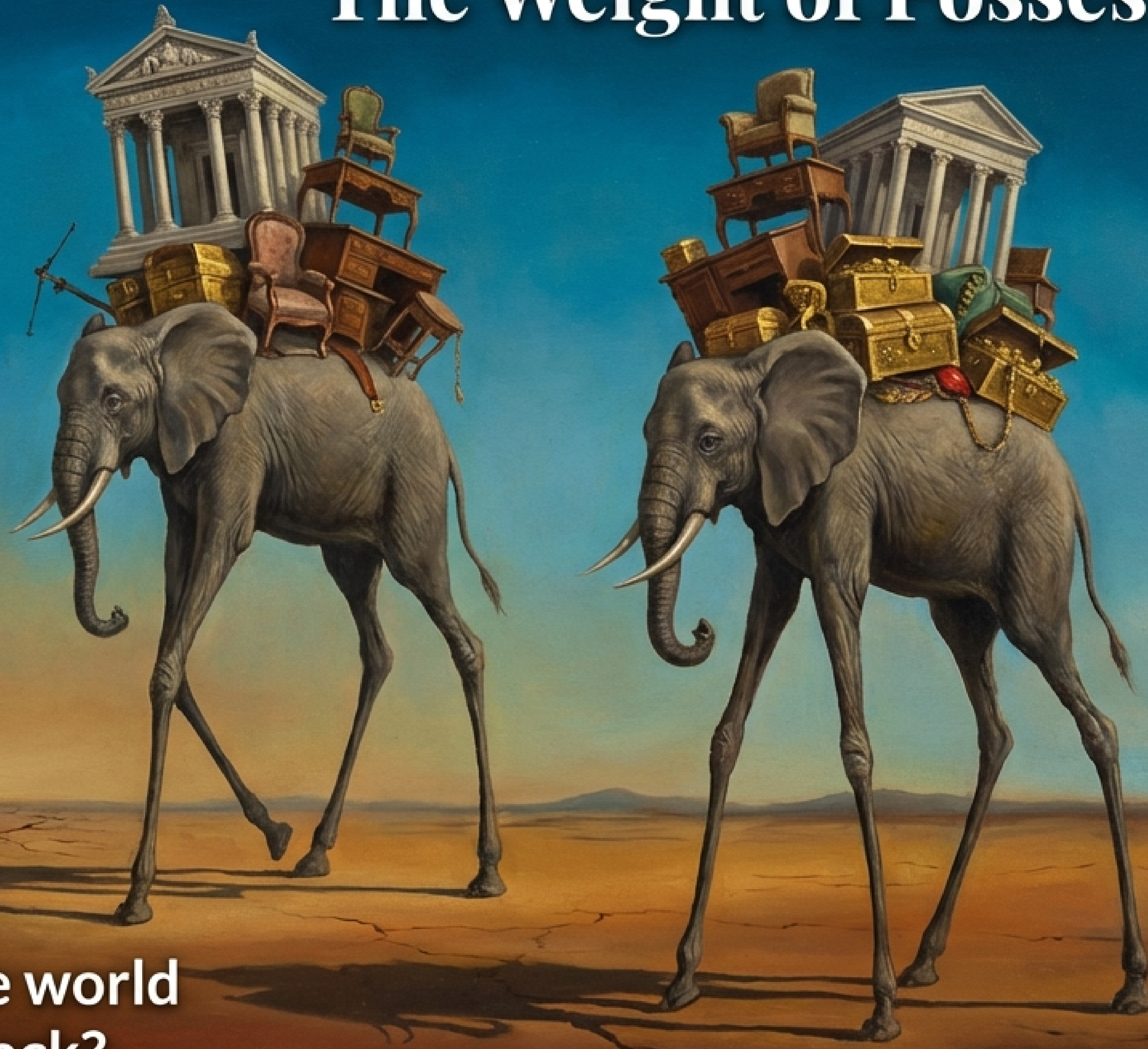
- Don't go to them for advice on moral issues.
- Excuse yourself from activities that violate your precepts.
- Observe without associating.

The Noise of the World



The media says: “Your time is unimportant; what matters is what other people are doing in other places.”
Meditation says: “The most important thing is what you are doing right here, right now.”
Exercise moderation. Watch the news being made right at your breath.

The Weight of Possession



Society encourages consumption without consequence. But every purchase entails a loss of freedom.

The more you own, the more you have to fear from theft, fire, or loss.
The things you own begin to own you.

Are you taking more from the world than you are willing to give back?

Fuel, Not Fun

Eating places a burden on the world. Do not search for "tip-top tastes with the tip of your tongue."

The Middle Way:

- Avoid gluttony (eating for entertainment)
- Avoid starvation (starving for vanity)

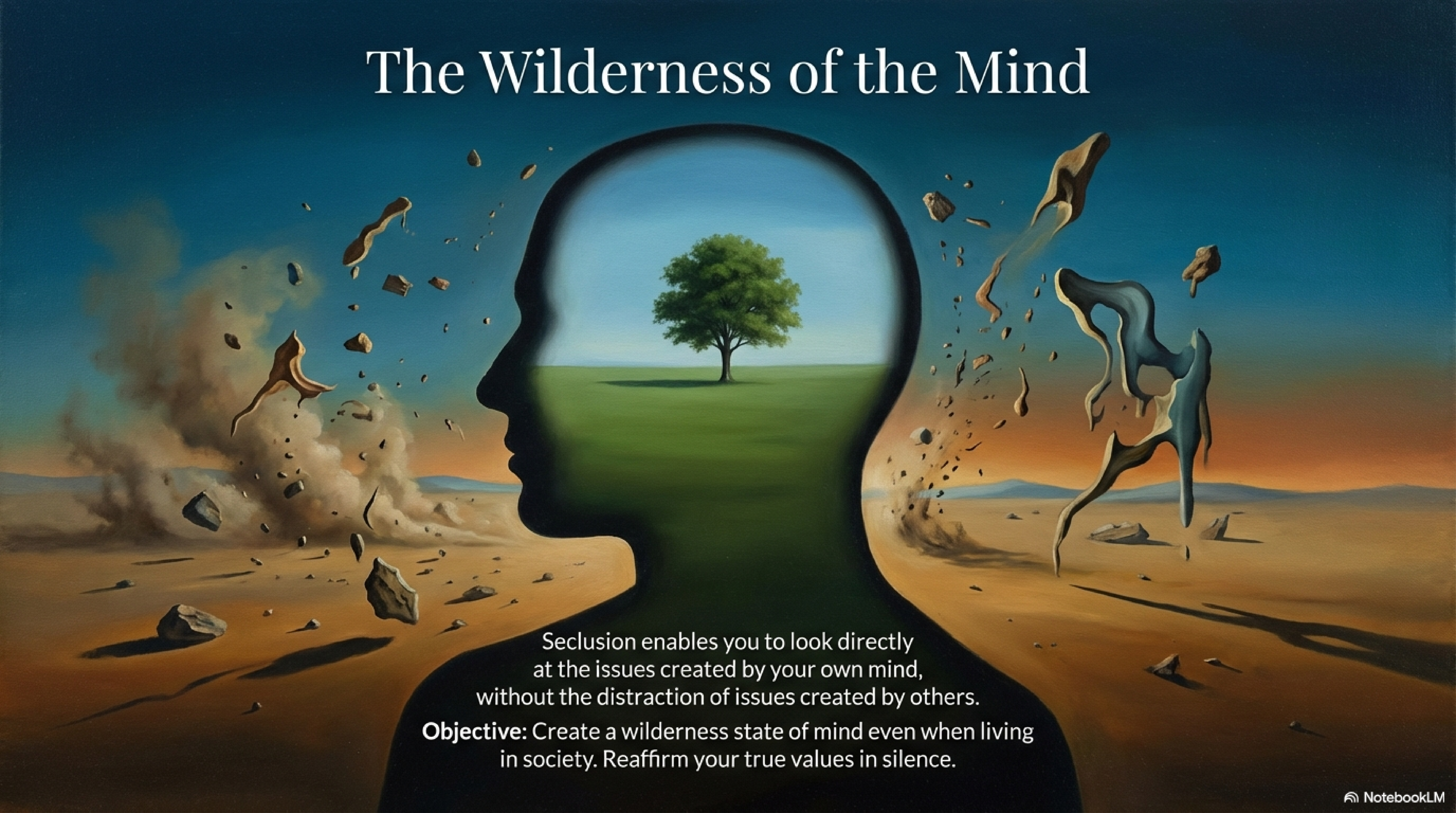
Goal: A sense of "just right"—enough
Goal: A sense of 'just right'—enough strength to train the mind.

Undoing the Perception of Gain

Media promotes **shopping** as therapy and purchase as victory. But every purchase is **a loss of resources** that could have been **used for generosity.**

Restrict purchases to the truly useful. Think of frugality as a gift you to yourself and the world—a release from the cycle of needing more.

The Wilderness of the Mind



Seclusion enables you to look directly
at the issues created by your own mind,
without the distraction of issues created by others.

Objective: Create a wilderness state of mind even when living
in society. Reaffirm your true values in silence.

Chanting & Framing

If your mind carries the debris of the day, use chanting to clear the air before you sit. The sound is calming, and the words put you in a new frame of mind. It acts as a sonic threshold between the world and your practice.

Weekly Sanctuaries: Uposatha

Traditionally, 4 days a month (full, new, and half moons) are set aside for earnest practice.

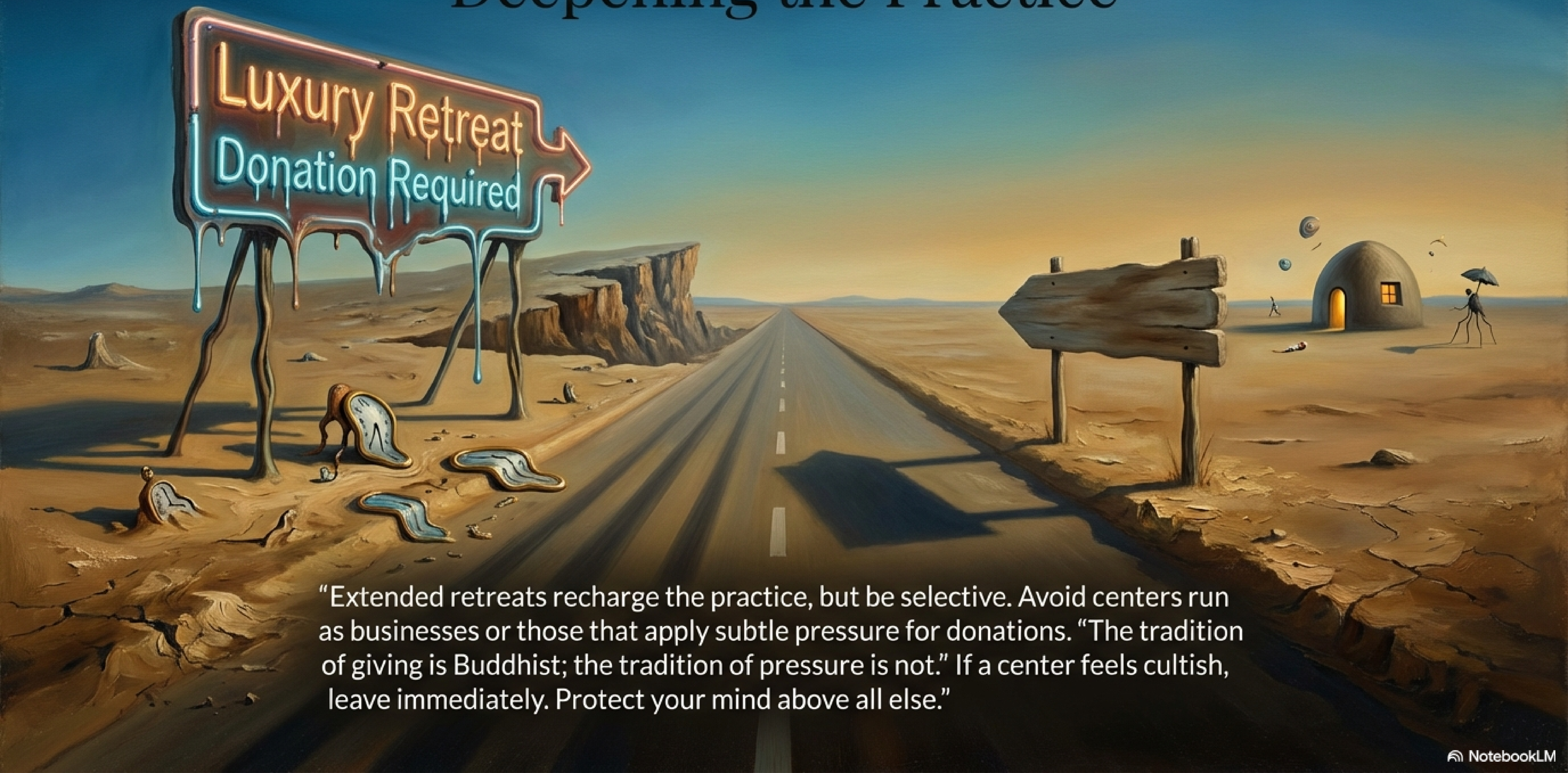
The 8 Precepts (Restraint of the Senses):

1. No food after noon.
2. No entertainment, jewelry, or cosmetics.
3. No high or luxurious beds.

These limits force you to stop looking for pleasure in the senses and find it in training the mind.

SUN
MON
TUE
WED
THU
FRI
SAT

Deepening the Practice



“Extended retreats recharge the practice, but be selective. Avoid centers run as businesses or those that apply subtle pressure for donations. “The tradition of giving is Buddhist; the tradition of pressure is not.” If a center feels cultish, leave immediately. Protect your mind above all else.”

The DIY Retreat

You don't need a center. Rent a cabin, or go camping on public land. Being in the wilderness puts the petty issues of daily life into their proper, small perspective. There is a reason the Buddha went into the wilderness to gain awakening.

Protecting Your Conviction

Luxury Retreat
Donation Required

No one will protect your happiness for you. You must build the shelter. “The most important thing happening in your world is what you’re doing right here, right now.”